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PP RUEHLMC  
DE RUEHTG #0353/01 1350011  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 150011Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9695  
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHMFIUU/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHDC  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC  
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAHND/CDRJTTFB SOTO CANO HO  
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RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHINGTON DC 0965  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAORC/US CUSTOMS AND BORDER WASHDC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: Mission Integrated Strategy to Fight Crime and Illicit  
Trafficking in La Mosquitia

¶1. Summary and Background: The Mosquitia is a huge swath of territory accounting for nearly 20 percent of Honduras' land mass on the eastern border with Nicaragua. The area is swampy, undeveloped, difficult to access and virtually uninhabited (only 60,000 people), which over the centuries has made the area a haven for pirates and smugglers. Today it is becoming a major operational platform for international traffickers of drugs, arms and people. As there are few employment opportunities, the traffickers are emerging as benevolent providers for the community. The remoteness of the area and difficult terrain creates major mobility and logistical difficulties for both law enforcement and the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF), to the benefit of the traffickers. Criminal organizations have found that the authorities (including law enforcement, HOAF, prosecutors and judges) that live in the area are easy to corrupt. The GOH has ignored this area, not providing adequate infrastructure, schools, and health facilities. The result is that the Mosquito, indigenous people, and Garifuna communities are among the poorest and most marginalized in Honduras. With unemployment and poverty rates high, the local population feels neglected and has little incentive to cooperate with the authorities.

¶2. Summary Continued: The GOH shares our concerns about the difficult situation in La Mosquitia. Using the policy and resource framework provided under the Merida Initiative, we have agreed to work on a bilateral integrated strategy to strengthen the operational capabilities of the security forces and law enforcement officials, as well as spur greater development, jobs and growth opportunities in La Mosquitia. Since October 2008, Ambassador and Mission officers have traveled with GOH civilian, police and military counterparts to the region several times. These visits, which have included inaugurating health clinics, schools and highlighted other development initiatives, have been positively received by the region's leaders and the people and have sent a strong public message of our bilateral commitment to the local community. In our engagement, we have listened carefully to community leaders and other stakeholders and discussed the best way the GOH and USG can be supportive. For example, recently we responded to community requests for assistance by providing hospital beds donated by U.S. charities for a health clinic we built and an

orphanage run by U.S. citizens. We also delivered food donated by the Italian government and held a widely publicized ceremony presided over by the Ambassador and the Minister of Defense to hand over four go-fast boats to the Honduran Navy, two of which will be stationed at the naval base at Barra de Carratasca in La Mosquitia to assist in the fight against narcotrafficking. The Embassy believes that progress can only be achieved through the immediate adoption of an integrated and focused strategy that involves GOH Ministries and U.S. Mission agencies at post. To this end, post has developed the following strategy for how to wage a more effective fight against criminal elements and take back La Mosquitia.

¶3. Summary continued: Post's interagency strategy for La Mosquitia brings together an integrated bilateral approach to partnering, prevention, interdiction, and law enforcement. Agencies, such as USAID, will focus on the prevention side, working with partner GOH agencies and the private sector to bolster health and education and create economic and employment opportunities for the people. Embassy sections are teaming with GOH counterparts to improve interagency and intergovernmental coordination and communication. The Public Affairs Section will be tasked with creating a comprehensive message to the Honduran people and the residents of La Mosquitia to publicize our efforts and make them partners in our efforts. And finally, we will work hand-in-hand with the various Ministries in the GOH to see how we can facilitate their efforts to shine attention on this traditionally neglected part of Honduras. End Summary.

¶4. OVERVIEW: Under the auspices of the Merida Initiative, the USG has initiated a multiagency/ multinational effort against gangs,

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organized crime and illicit trafficking in Honduras and the region. Within this broad effort, this strategy aims specifically to combat organized crime, gangs and illicit trafficking in Honduras. One of the prime battlegrounds in this effort is La Mosquitia/Gracias a Dios region.

¶5. BACKGROUND: La Mosquitia has become infested with illicit trafficking and high levels of criminality. The absence of adequate infrastructure, inaccessibility by Honduran law enforcement and military, small population and high poverty and exclusion levels have made it relatively easy for traffickers to influence and begin to wrest control of the area from central government control. The Honduran military lacks the resources to control the area, and the police and judiciary are spread thin, poorly trained and susceptible to threats and bribes. The growing infiltration and control of this remote region by the drug trafficking organizations has the potential to destabilize the rest of Honduras and spill over into neighboring countries such as Nicaragua. La Mosquitia is a critical corridor for the shipment of illicit drugs, arms, contraband and people into the United States. These networks also constitute a threat that could potentially be exploited by violent extremist organizations bent on targeting the United States.

¶6. OBJECTIVE: The U.S. Mission in Honduras, working in tandem with the Honduran government, will pursue a two-country, multiagency strategy to combat illicit trafficking and its deleterious effects in the La Mosquitia/Gracias a Dios region of Honduras. Our efforts in La Mosquitia will serve as a primary effort in our battle to fight illicit trafficking in greater Honduras and the region.

¶7. METHOD: The complex and extremely challenging nature of the illicit trafficking menace in La Mosquitia region requires a long-term, comprehensive solution consisting of aggressive partnering, prevention and interdiction.

¶A. Partnering: The U.S. Mission will pursue a comprehensive approach that leverages all available agencies and resources. We will partner first with the government and appropriate institutions and civil society organizations of Honduras. For this strategy to be effective, the people and government of Honduras must be in the lead. To that end, we will work with Honduras in an active but supportive role, advising, assisting and enabling, while taking pains to ensure that Honduras is actively captaining the effort. Beyond this crucial partnership, the U.S. Mission will coordinate

with other appropriate and effective government and nongovernment organizations to include the Departments of State (POL, ECON, USAID), Defense (DAO, MilGroup, and JTF-Bravo), and Justice (the Drug Enforcement Agency), Homeland Security (CBP and ICE. Crucially important, we will consult and partner with Miskito and other community leaders, including the Miskito President MASTA, village elders, religious leaders, mayors and others to refine our strategy, govern our actions and craft strategic messages.

1B. Prevention: With the conviction that preventing illicit trafficking is much more effective and desirable than attempting to combat it once established, the U.S. Mission team will work steadfastly with the GOH, donor nations, development banks, NGOs, and U.S. citizen and church groups to create an environment conducive to legitimate economic activity and sustainable development.

1C. Interdiction: Even as we carry out our robust prevention efforts, we must work in tandem to aggressively combat the ample illicit trafficking activities in and around La Mosquitia that already exist. These interdiction efforts will be focused on finding, disrupting, arresting, and prosecuting illicit traffickers and trafficking.

18. ENDSTATE: The desired result of our partnering, prevention and  
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interdiction efforts is to substantially reduce the activities and influence of international illicit drug and criminal organizations and assist the Honduran government in securing control and authority over La Mosquitia for the benefit of its citizens.

#### 19. SPECIFIC AGENCY ACTIONS

##### 1A. U.S. Agency for International Development:

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In La Mosquitia, organized crime and the narcotics trade are undermining local institutions, spawning lawlessness, distorting the economy, and discouraging legitimate investments. It is assumed that this threat can be mitigated if some of the internal structural weaknesses in the region are addressed and concerted efforts are made to strengthen community organizations and local governance. USAID plans to implement a community-based approach towards the provision of basic social and productive infrastructure in La Mosquitia. To strengthen communities in the area, USAID will utilize established partnerships with the Ministries of Governance, Health, and Education; Fondo Hondureo de Inversisn Social (FHIS), the GOH social safety net program; local governments and communities; and NGOs. For example, USAID will support the efforts of municipalities to create educational and job opportunities, improve health services, build community infrastructure, and promote community values. Illustrative activities include:

- Improved obstetric and neonatal care and family planning services at the regional hospital and clinics, including the clinic built by the DOD in Tansin. Work with Ministry of Health to assign a doctor to this clinic.
- Improved educational and health facilities, security, street lighting, and safer parks and public spaces, through small community-led infrastructure projects.
- Reduced violence and increased citizen participation in local governance, through the establishment of an alternative dispute resolution center, a civic education project, and a social auditing/oversight project.
- Improved access to vocational education for at-risk youth and to primary and secondary education, through both the formal education system and an alternative radio program for out-of-school youth. (Research done by Save the Children shows that youth who have either not attended primary school or dropped out have higher probabilities of becoming gang members. In contrast, completing primary school reduces the probability of becoming a gang member to 8% and completing the 9th grade reduces the probability to only 1.6 %.) Vocational education will focus on workforce development

opportunities related to services and trades that are in short supply in the region (i.e. mechanics, electronics repair, restaurant cooks, tour guides, etc.).

- Growth of rural enterprises increased, including (1) value-added agriculture and agro-processing (eg, cassava, batana, rice, cacao, fish, etc.), (2) sustainable forestry and value-added wood products (eg, certified wood, artisanal furniture, guitar parts, etc.) and (3) tourism and related services (eg, eco-lodges, restaurants, sports fishing, bird watching, river/forest excursions, regional cultural activities, etc.).
- Increased micro loans for local businesses and farmers through the Development Credit Authority loan guarantee project in conjunction with NGOs and local banks.
- Increased partnerships with private sector associations to enhance long-term strategic planning on Mosquitia development, as well as public/private partnerships to increase private investment in key sectors in the region.

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- Reduced energy costs and improved access to reliable energy supplies through the utilization of small-scale, renewable energy sources - wind, solar, biogas, micro-hydro.
- Improved disaster preparedness and prevention, maximizing the involvement of at-risk youth.
- Improved management of protected areas and communal forest lands to create opportunities for both tourist (short-term) and carbon-credit (long-term) related revenues.

#### B. Economic Section:

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Partnering with USAID, GOH and communities of La Mosquitia, we will work to build community infrastructure, increase opportunities for legitimate business and commerce, and help create money-earning opportunities as an alternative to drug-related activities. Focus first on ways to help La Mosquitia in economic capacity building and renewable energy.

- Provide technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Energy (and private entities) on providing electricity to remote Mosquitia villages via small-scale off-grid wind and solar installations.
- Contract trade and development expert to assess the export potential of La Mosquitia fisheries, agro-forestry and other products and advise local authorities and business groups on how to exploit these and other potential opportunities such as tourism.
- Help the communities of La Mosquitia develop infrastructure in order to facilitate their access to markets in and outside of the region. Determine how better transportation systems can be built, such as by air, boats/ferries, canals, and roads, and consider personal, commercial, and community transport.

#### C. U.S. Military Group:

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The Mil Group will partner with the interagency team, the Armed Forces of Honduras (HOAF) and other government and nongovernmental organizations; contribute to prevention by working to develop an environment less hospitable to trafficking; and support interdiction efforts - through building HOAF's ability to combat traffickers and trafficking as well as building interagency/international capacity to combat illicit trafficking.

##### 1) Partnering

- The Mil Group will continue to partner with the HOAF to improve their ability to prevent, detect, interdict and disrupt illicit trafficking in La Mosquitia.
- Encourage full operation of JTF-"Policarpo Paz Garca" in Puerto Lempira as a joint task force focused on integrating and

synchronizing counter-trafficking efforts.

- Work with the Estado Mayor Conjunto and each of the Honduran Services to improve interservice cooperation and operations involving the police.
- Continue to invest in and leverage Conferencia de Fuerzas Armadas Centroamericanas (CFAC) to promote regional integration, interoperability and stability.
- Leverage future Regional Air Surveillance System to detect illicit trafficking flights, combat trafficking networks and build intra-regional cooperation.

## 2) Prevention

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- Utilize the Military Information Support Team campaign to convince residents of La Mosquitia: that illicit trafficking is bad for Honduras, themselves, their children and their future; to reject criminals and criminal activity; to assist authorities by reporting illegal activity; and to support their government, police and armed forces.
- Using Humanitarian Assistance Program funds, the Mil Group will synergize efforts with USAID in constructing and enhancing schools, clinics, orphanages and other similar facilities in the region. Examples of projects already completed include: Escuela La Fraternidad, Orphanage Mamatara and the Puerto Lempira Hyperbaric Chamber facility.
- Work with the HOAF on community improvement and humanitarian projects so that the citizens of the area see them as being involved and part of the solution.
- Provide training, equipment and funds for HOAF and COPECO and work with USAID and JTF-Bravo to respond to natural disasters and relief operations.
- Work with HOAF and the Defense Attache to destroy obsolete weapons - especially those prone to proliferation.
- Continue to emphasize professional military education for HOAF officers and noncommissioned officers to improve regional interaction and stability and to reinforce the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and civilian control of the military.

## 3) Interdiction

- Continue base construction and enhancement of forward counter-trafficking bases of Caratasca and Mocoron. Construct CD base on Bay Island of Guanaja (which will complement counter-drug effort in La Mosquitia).
- Provide key training and equipment to improve the HOAF's ability to detect and interdict illicit trafficking. Buy additional drug interceptor boats for the Honduran Navy and additional light observation aircraft for the Air Force to conduct coastal patrol. Equip select units with equipment such as night vision goggles, body armor and radios.
- Fully exploit Operation Enduring Freedom - Caribbean and Central America program to train and equip select HOAF units in counter-narcoterrorism (CNT) operations. Continue key CNT training of the 1st Special Forces Battalion and increase training of the 15th Special Forces Battalion, 1st Marine Battalion and Navy's maritime interceptor units. Expand training with vetted COBRA police units to work with HOAF, DEA and JTF-B in counter-narcotics operations. When fully trained, work to bring select HOAF Special Forces and vetted Cobra units to La Mosquitia on TDY basis.
- Invest in HOAF command and control capability and architecture. Equip and enhance the nascent Honduran counter-drug Joint Task Force "Policarpo Paz Garca" and work toward establishing it as an

interservice/interagency organization capable of fusing joint intelligence and operations. Operationalize a country-wide military communications net bought with Enduring Friendship funds to enhance joint command and control of operations.

- Work with DEA, Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-South), JTF-Bravo and HOAF to synchronize counter-drug operations. Utilize newly purchased equipment, command and control systems and training to increase the effectiveness of combined CNT efforts in the region.

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- Continue to improve logistics to serve as a force-multiplier of key equipment, especially forward-based counter-drug helicopters and interceptor boats in La Mosquitia. Acquire HOAF refueling/logistics support vessels to support coastal drug interdiction operations.

- Utilize Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff-sponsored international exercises to improve HOAF capability, provide "military presence" in select departments and build regional cooperation. 2009 CJCS exercises include: Tradewinds, Beyond the Horizon, Fuerzas Aliadas Humanitarias, PKO Americas, and Fuerzas Aliadas Panamax.

#### 1D. Joint Task Force-Bravo:

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JTF-B supports the Commander, US Southern Command's Theater Cooperation Strategy throughout Central America. In Honduras, in close coordination with the Embassy Country Team and JIATF-S, JTF-B has focused much of its efforts in La Mosquitia to support the Counter-Narcoterrorism mission throughout this region. Additionally, JTF-B continues to support Special Operations Command, South (SOC SOUTH) in its execution of OEF-CCA. Finally, JTF-B also supports US Army South in its execution of PANAMAX 2009, as it did for PANAMAX 2008, in the La Mosquitia/Gracias a Dios region. JTF-B will support this by executing Exercise Related Construction (ERC) and numerous Medical Readiness Training Exercises (MEDRETES) in the region. Some of the highlights from above initiatives concentrated in La Mosquitia are:

##### 1) Counter-Narcoterrorism (CNT) Support

- Assist with helicopter support and aviation-related training in the execution of CNT operations.
- Assist with future basing of CNT aircraft at Soto Cano.
- Re-furbish and fill fuel tank in Mocoron to extend reach and loiter time for CNT operations.

##### 2) OEF-CCA Support

- Continue to provide helicopter support and aviation-related training for SOC SOUTH training with the HOAF.
- Assist with positioning of SOC SOUTH-purchased mobile fuel tanks in Puerto Castilla and Caratasca.

##### 3) PANAMAX '09 Exercise Related Construction/ Medical Readiness Training Exercise Support

- Establish Joint Task Force to command and control US and Partner Nation assets in Honduras for PANAMAX '09.
- Execute approximately \$155K in ERC funds in the Puerto Castilla, La Brea (Rio Claro), Mocoron, and Puerto Lempira areas according to US MILGRP priorities during PANAMAX 09.
- Execute numerous MEDRETES throughout the La Mosquitia/Gracias a Dios region during PANAMAX 09.

#### 1E. Joint Interagency Task Force-South/Tactical Analysis Team:

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JIATF-South conducts counter-illicit trafficking operations, intelligence fusion and multi-sensor correlation to detect, monitor,



and hand off suspected illicit trafficking targets. JIATF-S also promotes security cooperation and coordinates Country Team and partner nation initiatives in order to defeat the flow of illicit traffic. Under this broad regional mission, JIATF-South and the Honduras-based Tactical Analysis Team will:

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- Support Honduran Joint Task Force elements (primarily Honduran Navy) with intelligence and information support provided by TATs, military, law enforcement agencies, partner nations and other agencies/organizations.
- Continue to sponsor and support the Cooperating Nation Information Exchange Service (CNIES) communications network in both Barra de Caratasca and Puerto Castilla (which both conduct operations in La Mosquitia.)
- Coordinate efforts with U.S. Navy, Coast Guard and other service assets (e.g. ships & Maritime Patrol Aircraft) while effecting "end-game," counter-narcotics operations. Employ a number of US airborne and maritime platforms to aid in targeting and interdicting highly mobile, constantly evolving illicit-trafficking targets.

#### F. Drug Enforcement Agency:

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DEA will continue to commit agents and resources to counter-narcotics operations focused at disrupting and dismantling the drug trafficking organizations that are exploiting La Mosquitia, especially those likely to result in criminal prosecutions. These resources will be made available to the Honduran Police, the Organized Crime Prosecutor and the Honduran military.

- The DEA Country Office together with JTF-Bravo and US military special operations trainers have completed initial training of the vetted Honduran Police Tactical Reaction Team (TRT), readying this force for future interdiction operations in La Mosquitia. DEA agents are ready to deploy to the region and accompany the vetted TRT for appropriate missions.
- DEA & TAT are currently working with Mil Group to ensure coordination of La Mosquitia efforts.

#### G. Department of Homeland Security/ Immigration and Customs Enforcement:

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The ICE Assistant Attach, Tegucigalpa, works closely with the Government of Honduras to target transnational criminal organizations operating in La Mosquitia.

- Specifically, the ICE Assistant Attache in conjunction with the GOH has formed a special investigative unit to investigate trafficking in persons, bulk cash smuggling, money laundering, arms trafficking, and sex tourism.
- With proper resourcing, future ICE activities could include outreach to governmental and nongovernmental organizations within Honduras to bring attention to the illicit activities of the region and, in so doing, develop the necessary investigative leads which have proven effective in the dismantlement of criminal enterprises.

#### H. Political Section:

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The Political Section, through its International Narcotics and Law Enforcement program and Merida Initiative funds, will look at ways to help better equip the police, such as with motorcycles to help them patrol their area and computers that would tie them into the rest of the HNP network. This equipment would assist them with enforcing the laws, building trust, and making the citizens of La Mosquitia feel safe. We will also attempt to develop partnerships with local NGOs who work with at-risk youth, and use our anti-gang/at-risk youth money to fund programs to keep youth off the streets.

#### I. Regional Security Office:

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 RSO's key role will be in supporting the increased activities of other mission members in La Mosquitia. Through interaction with local police, RSO will also provide important security "atmospherics" and insight on conditions in the region.

J. The Defense Attache Office and the Office of Regional Affairs:

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 Utilizing extensive contact networks, DAO and ORA are uniquely capable of determining "ground truth," identifying promising strategies/actions and encouraging partner nation leaders to support unified GOH/USG efforts in La Mosquitia. Both DAO and ORA are key members of the La Mosquitia Working Group and the Strategic Communications Working Group.

- Anti-corruption: ORA & DAO will take the lead in following up on the Minister of Security's desire to bring a special prosecutor and judge from Tegucigalpa to work narcotics cases in La Mosquitia.

K. Public Affairs Section:

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 Communications and the right public messages are crucial major elements of our La Mosquitia strategy -- without which we cannot succeed. Accordingly, PAS will play a pivotal role in the Strategic Communications Working Group (outlined in para. 10 below).

- Work with press to draw attention to La Mosquitia, the crucial fight against illicit-trafficking and the positive contributions the GOH and United States are doing for Honduras. Work to publish a series of articles in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula and key towns of La Mosquitia. Do the same for radio and TV.

- Continue to build on the success of the "American Corner" projects with new locations and by expanding existing corners.

Note: The Ambassador visited La Mosquitia on two occasions and inaugurated a Defense Department-funded school in Puerto Lempira and a health clinic in Tansin. The Ambassador also broke ground on the construction project for the building of the Caratasca Naval base, attended the donation of a hyperbaric chamber for a health clinic and books for the American Corner in Puerto Lempira. Both of these visits received prominent and positive media coverage in Honduras.

10. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS: Strategic communications is a crucial major element of our La Mosquitia strategy, and is, in fact, instrumental to our success. We must have a strong communications campaign to convince the citizens of La Mosquitia (and Honduras) to actively reject trafficking/traffickers and choose lawful, productive activities and lives.

- We will form a Strategic Communications Working Group (SCWG) to craft a Strategic Communications campaign in support of our overall La Mosquitia objectives. Core members of the SCWG will include: PAS, ORA, Mil Group-MIST, JTF-B, DAO, POL, and USAID. After completing the initial Strat Comm plan, the SCWG will meet at least monthly to review events, developments and update the overall plan of action with specific actions and products.

- Among themes to communicate: drugs are illegal and destructive; drugs bring crime, violence, addiction, and low education rates; and drugs ultimately destroy Miskito/Honduran families and their futures. We must educate the populace to win them over. We will publicize the positive contributions the GOH, HOAF and USG are making in the region.

- As illiteracy is high, we will use multi media, especially radio. We will be careful to ensure the use of both Miskito and Spanish languages as appropriate.



- Outside of La Mosquitia, we will use the press to draw attention to the threat of traffickers in La Mosquitia as well as the plight of the Miskitos. We will use these stories to encourage more GOH and NGO participation and interest in La Mosquitia. Help GOH show La Mosquitia communities and their citizens that it cares more about them than the traffickers do.

- Consult with Miskito and other community leaders to help craft our messages on what is important to the communities from which we seek to push out the illicit traffickers.

- Encourage and facilitate frequent visits to the area by the GOH and HOAF, along with the U.S. Embassy, as they are a key part of our strategic communications strategy -- the visits show the communities of La Mosquitia that they are important to us. It is also a key part of the GOH taking back control of their sovereign territory.

11. COMMENT: Drug trafficking organizations have targeted La Mosquitia and its citizens. The region is rife with massive shipments of Colombian cocaine. Our key partner, the GOH, lacks the resources to control the region and defeat the problem, while the population of La Mosquitia remains isolated and unconvinced the traffickers are really the problem.

Despite these and other constraints, we believe our strategy provides an opportunity to begin to turn the tide. We will employ both preventative and enforcement efforts and leverage the resources and concepts under the Merida Initiative to improve our operational effectiveness and deliver a major blow to international crime and help support regional stability. We also will develop performance measures over time to determine the level of success of this effort.

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